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RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1090
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 CARACAS 003356

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DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

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SUBJECT: USAID/OTI PROGRAMMATIC SUPPORT FOR COUNTRY TEAM 5
POINT STRATEGY

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Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) During his 8 years in power, President Chavez has systematically dismantled the institutions of democracy and governance. The USAID/OTI program objectives in Venezuela focus on strengthening democratic institutions and spaces through non-partisan cooperation with many sectors of Venezuelan society.

¶2. (S) In August of 2004, Ambassador outlined the country team's 5 point strategy to guide embassy activities in Venezuela for the period 2004) 2006 (specifically, from the referendum to the 2006 presidential elections). The strategy's focus is: 1) Strengthening Democratic Institutions, 2) Penetrating Chavez' Political Base, 3) Dividing Chavismo, 4) Protecting Vital US business, and 5) Isolating Chavez internationally.

¶3. (S) A brief description of USAID/OTI activities during the aforementioned time period in support of the strategy follows:

Strengthen Democratic Institutions

¶4. (S) This strategic objective represents the majority of USAID/OTI work in Venezuela. Organized civil society is an increasingly important pillar of democracy, one where President Chavez has not yet been able to assert full control.

¶5. (S) OTI has supported over 300 Venezuelan civil society

organizations with technical assistance, capacity building, connecting them with each other and international movements, and with financial support upwards of \$15 million. Of these, 39 organizations focused on advocacy have been formed since the arrival of OTI; many of these organizations as a direct result of OTI programs and funding.

16. (S) Human Rights: OTI supports the Freedom House (FH) "Right to Defend Human Rights" program with \$1.1 million. Simultaneously through Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), OTI has also provided 22 grants to human rights organizations, totaling \$726,000. FH provides training and technical assistance to 15 different smaller and regional human rights organizations on how to research, document, and present cases in situations of judicial impunity through a specialized software and proven techniques. Following are some specific successes from this project, which has led to a better understanding internationally of the deteriorating human rights situation in the country:

Venezuelan Prison Observatory: Since beginning work with OTI, OVP has taken 1 case successfully through the inter-American system, achieving a ruling requiring BRV special protective measures for the prison "La Pica". Also, on November 7th - 12th they will be launching the Latin-American Prison Observatory, consolidating their work with a regional network. OVP receives technical support from FH, as well as monetary support from Pan American Development Foundation (PADF). Due to the success of the OVP in raising awareness of the issue, the BRV has put pressure on them in the form of public statements, announcing investigations, accusing them of alleged crimes as well as death threats.

Central Venezuelan University Human Rights Center: This center was created out of the FH program and a grant from

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DAI. They have successfully raised awareness regarding the International Cooperation Law and the human rights situation in Venezuela, and have served as a voice nationally and internationally.

Human Rights Lawyers Network in Bolivar State: This group was created out of the FH program and a grant from the DAI small grants program. They are currently supporting the victims of a massacre of 12 miners in Bolivar State allegedly by the Venezuelan Army. Chavez himself was forced to admit that the military used excessive force in this case. They will present their case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in February 2007.

17. (S) Citizen Participation in Governance: Venezuelan NGOs lack a long history of social activism. In response, OTI partners are training NGOs to be activists and become more involved in advocacy. The successes of this focus have been as follows:

Support for the Rights of the Handicapped: OTI has funded 3 projects in the Caracas area dealing with the rights of the handicapped. Venezuela had neither the appropriate legislation nor political will to assure that the cities are designed and equipped in a handicapped sensitive fashion. Through these programs, OTI brought the issue of the handicapped to the forefront, trained advocacy groups to advocate for their rights and lobby the National Assembly, and alerted the press regarding this issue. Subsequent to this, the National Assembly was forced to consider handicapped needs and propose draft legislation for the issue.

Por la Caracas Possible (PCP): Once-beautiful Caracas has decayed over the past several years due to corruption and lack of attention. PCP is a local NGO dedicated to bringing attention to this problem. They have held campaigns with communities shining a light on the terrible job elected leadership are doing resolving the problems in Caracas. During their work they have been expelled from communities by

the elected leaders, further infuriating communities that already feel un-assisted.

¶8. (S) Civic Education: One effective Chavista mechanism of control applies democratic vocabulary to support revolutionary Bolivarian ideology. OTI has been working to counter this through a civic education program called "Democracy Among Us". This interactive education program works through NGOs in low income communities to deliver five modules: 1) Separation of Powers, 2) Rule of Law, 3) The Role and Responsibility of Citizens, 4) Political Tolerance, and 5) The Role of Civil Society. Separate civic education programs in political tolerance, participation, and human rights have reached over 600,000 people.

Penetrate Base/Divide Chavismo

¶9. (S) Another key Chavez strategy is his attempt to divide and polarize Venezuelan society using rhetoric of hate and violence. OTI supports local NGOs who work in Chavista strongholds and with Chavista leaders, using those spaces to counter this rhetoric and promote alliances through working together on issues of importance to the entire community. OTI has directly reached approximately 238,000 adults through over 3000 forums, workshops and training sessions delivering alternative values and providing opportunities for opposition activists to interact with hard-core Chavistas, with the desired effect of pulling them slowly away from Chavismo. We have supported this initiative with 50 grants totaling over \$1.1 million. There are several key examples of this:

¶10. (S) Visor Participativo: This is a group of 34 OTI

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funded and technically assisted NGOs working together on municipal strengthening. They work in 48 municipalities (Venezuela has 337), with 31 MVR, 2 PPT and 15 opposition mayors. As Chavez attempts to re-centralize the country, OTI through Visor is supporting decentralization. Much of this is done through the municipal councils (CLPPs). The National Assembly recently passed a law that creates groups parallel to the mayor's offices and municipal councils (and that report directly to the president's office). These groups are receiving the lions share of new monies Chavez is pumping into the regions, leaving the municipalities under-funded. As Chavez attempts to re-centralize all power to the Executive in the capital, local Chavista leadership are becoming the opposition as their individual oxen are gored. Visor has been providing these leaders with tools and skills for leadership to counter the threat represented by the new legislation.

¶11. (S) CECAVID: This project supported an NGO working with women in the informal sectors of Barquisimeto, the 5th largest city in Venezuela. The training helped them negotiate with city government to provide better working conditions. After initially agreeing to the women's conditions, the city government reneged and the women shut down the city for 2 days forcing the mayor to return to the bargaining table. This project is now being replicated in another area of Venezuela.

¶12. (S) PROCATIA: OTI has partnered with a group widely perceived by people in the large Caracas &barrio8 as opposition leaning. Due to incompetence of the local elected leadership, the garbage problem in Catia is a messy issue for all those who live there. This group has organized brigades to collect and recycle trash, in the process putting pressure on the government to provide basic services and repositioning the group as a respected ally of the "barrio."

¶13. (S) Finally, through support of a positive social impact campaign in cooperation with PAS, OTI funded 54 social projects all over the country, at over \$1.2 million, allowing

Ambassador to visit poor areas of Venezuela and demonstrate US concern for the Venezuelan people. This program fosters confusion within the Bolivarian ranks, and pushes back at the attempt of Chavez to use the United States as a "unifying enemy."

Isolate Chavez

¶14. (S) An important component of the OTI program is providing information internationally regarding the true revolutionary state of affairs. OTI's support for human rights organizations has provided ample opportunity to do so. The FH exchanges allowed Venezuelan human rights organizations to visit Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Costa Rica, and Washington DC to educate their peers regarding the human rights situation. Also, DAI has brought dozens of international leaders to Venezuela, university professors, NGO members, and political leaders to participate in workshops and seminars, who then return to their countries with a better understanding of the Venezuelan reality and as stronger advocates for the Venezuelan opposition.

¶15. (S) More recently, OTI has taken advantage of the draft law of International Cooperation to send NGO representatives to international NGO conferences where they are able to voice their concerns in terms that global civil society understands. So far, OTI has sent Venezuelan NGO leaders to Turkey, Scotland, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Chile, Uruguay, Washington and Argentina (twice) to talk about the law. Upcoming visits are planned to Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia.

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OTI has also brought 4 recognized experts in NGO law from abroad to Venezuela to show solidarity for their Venezuelan counterparts. PADF supported visits by 4 key human rights defenders to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission meetings in Washington in October of 2006. These have led to various successes:

Civicus, a world alliance of NGOs, has put the Venezuela issue on their Civil Society Watch short list of countries of concern.

Gente de Soluciones, a Venezuelan NGO presented their "Project Society" to the OAS General Assembly. While there, they met with many of the Ambassadors and Foreign Ministers of OAS member states to express concern about the law.

Uruguayan parliamentarians met with NGOs at a special session of the Foreign Affairs commission, and have promised to help where they can.

The Human Rights Commission of the OAS has made several public statements and sent private letters to the National Assembly expressing concern with the law.

The most prestigious law faculty in Buenos Aires, Argentina has committed to hosting an event to deal with the draft law.

The Democratic Observatory of MERCOSUR plans to hold an event early next year to discuss the draft law.

So far the Venezuelan National Assembly has received many letters and emails of opposition to the law from groups all over the world.

A private meeting between 4 Venezuelan human rights defenders and Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulsa during the October 2006 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (please protect).

The press, both local and international, has been made aware of the proposed law and it has received wide play in the US

as well as in Latin America

¶16. (S) OTI has also created a web site which has been sent to thousands of people all over the world with details of the law in an interactive format.

Comment

¶17. (S) Through carrying out positive activities, working in a non-partisan way across the ideological landscape, OTI has been able to achieve levels of success in carrying out the country team strategy in Venezuela. These successes have come with increasing opposition by different sectors of Venezuelan society and the Venezuelan government. Should Chavez win the December 3rd presidential elections, OTI expects the atmosphere for our work in Venezuela to become more complicated.

BROWNFIELD